News release

Met Office warnings help hospitals weather the heat

12 August 2003

Hospitals received advance warning of the current prolonged spell of extreme hot weather thanks to the Met Office's pioneering '*Forecasting the Nation's Health*' initiative. The project uses weather forecasts and research data to provide managers with advance warning of the impacts of weather on health, and therefore hospital workloads, in their area. This allows them to plan the use of resources more efficiently.

Under the initiative, participating hospital trusts were alerted where and when to expect increased emergency admissions. At this time of year, the number of emergency admissions is generally expected to be lower than normal. The advance warning enabled managers to prepare for increased Accident and Emergency attendances and admissions so that delays were minimised, and patients were not inconvenienced.

Lyn Robertshaw, Director of Operations and Nursing, The Royal West Sussex NHS Trust**,** said:
"Since working with the Met Office as part of the '*Forecasting the Nation's Health*' project we have been aware that with persistent hot weather, we tend to see a rise in medical emergencies relating to chest pain. The coronary care unit has been extremely busy so has the medical assessment unit. Thanks to the information we received we were able to prepare, despite the fact that this is the height of the holiday season for our staff."

Maria Mulrennan, Operations Centre Manager, Addenbrookes NHS Trust**,** said:
"The impact of hot weather at Addenbrookes has been that emergency admissions overall have remained high. During this period the number of stroke and cardiac patients has been higher. We've also seen an increase in the number of evening and night time asthma admissions."

Dr William Bird, Met Office Medical Consultant**,** said:
"It is not the peaking temperatures, but the persistence of these high temperatures that is causing the problem. The human body can cope with high daytime temperatures so long as it has time to cool overnight. Consistent high day time and night time temperatures have a cumulative effect on the body. The result has been increased pressure on the NHS.

"By forecasting this prolonged period of hot weather in advance, we have been able to issue advance warnings to hospitals participating in our pilot project, enabling them to take action to prepare for the increased workload."

Temperatures records were broken across England and Wales last week. On Sunday a new record for the UK was set when the temperature reached 38.1 °C in Gravesend, the first time the temperature has passed 100 °F in Britain. It will stay warm across the UK this week but less oppressive than recent days.

Dr James Goodwin, Head of Research at Help the Aged**,** said:
"Climatic extremes, whether hot or cold, tend to affect older people more than the rest of the population. Extremely hot weather can be debilitating, particularly if humidity is also high.

"The main problems experienced by older people tend to be heat exhaustion, heat stroke, heart attacks and strokes. Help the Aged urges older people to take sensible precautions this week - drink plenty of fluids, try to stay indoors during the hottest part of the day, avoid physical exertion and exposure to the sun for long periods."

More about Met Office services for the *health sector*

More about *forecasting the nation's health*

Notes:

About the Met Office
The Met Office is a world leader in the provision of advice on the weather and the natural environment. For 150 years, we have been the UK's national weather service, providing services to government departments, companies in commerce, industry and the media. However, the Met Office does not just focus on 'the weather'. We look at the impacts of the weather on business and the environment and have expanded into providing environmental science services, including hydrology and oceanography. The Met Office is also expanding our international operations and is extending co-operation and forging partnerships within the international 'weather' communities.

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